

## **Executive Order Press Conference Remarks**

March 27, 2008

Members of the General Assembly;  
Major O'Donnell;  
Jerry Williams;  
AT Wall;  
Lisa Holley, Rhode Island State Parole Board;  
John Lawlor, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement;

We all know that we are a nation of immigrants and most Rhode Islanders are descendants of immigrants. My grandparents emigrated from Italy and Sweden. I fully understand the desire to come to the United States to build a better life. For generations, people have arrived on our shores from all corners of the world to realize the American Dream. But they followed the appropriate procedures and came here legally.

Unfortunately, over the last few decades, the federal government has consistently ignored the complex issue of illegal immigration. As a result, the flow of illegal immigrants has become epidemic with the consequential costs being borne by state taxpayers. That means that Governors throughout the nation are having to deal with the results of Congress' inaction. In fact, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, states have passed a record number of bills which focus on the control of illegal immigration. Last year states enacted 3x the number of illegal immigration bills than they did in 2006. And the issue is being debated in all 50 state capitols.

Here is Rhode Island, as in most states, we don't even know how many illegal immigrants there are. According to the Pew Hispanic Center we have an estimated 40,000 illegal immigrants in Rhode Island. That's more than the population of most of our state's cities and towns. This puts a tremendous strain upon our public schools, hospitals, state and local human services organizations and law enforcement agencies. That in, turn, has an impact upon state and local budgets. In these difficult fiscal times, we are struggling for resources to take care of the neediest amongst us who are here legally. Further, under the Deficit Reduction Act, state government is being required to ensure that only legal residents are obtaining Medicaid support.

Today I am issuing an Executive Order which will enable a vast array of state government agencies to better address the issue of illegal immigration in Rhode Island.

First, this Executive Order will pave the way for the Department of Administration to register and use a federal government program to verify electronically that all Executive branch employees are legally eligible to be employed in the United States and take action against those who are not.

Second, the Department of Administration will require all companies, contractors and vendors doing business with the State of Rhode Island to use the federal E-Verify program to ensure that their employees are working in our country legally.

Over the past several years, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia enacted legislation that addresses this issue.

By ensuring that there are no illegal immigrants employed in the Executive Branch and that those who do business with the state do not employ illegal immigrants, we are setting an example for others to follow. This will encourage the private sector to comply.

Third, this Executive Order will give the Directors of state agencies the authority to notify those whose identity was stolen or used improperly to receive benefits such as child care, health care or a driver's license to name just a few.

Fourth, the Rhode Island State Police will establish a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to receive training to assist ICE personnel in arresting illegal immigrants. Currently, if the state police arrest illegal immigrants they must call ICE to determine if deportation will be pursued. With this new partnership, the state police who have been trained by ICE will be able to access federal databases, process immigration prisoners and drive them to the Wyatt Detention Center. This is a more efficient process. It is imperative for the state police to have the ability to enforce immigration laws if they come across individuals who are illegal immigrants.

Fifth, the Department of Corrections will also develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement to enable state correctional officers to have the authority and the necessary training to address illegal immigration issues at the ACI. Correction officers will be trained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement to perform some of the duties of ICE agents such as investigating immigration status and preparing the necessary documentation for those who have been found to be in this country illegally. Using the resources and training from ICE, they will establish clear intake procedures for those coming into the ACI, and conduct a review of all current inmates to identify those who are here illegally.

Sixth, the Parole Board and the Department of Corrections will work cooperatively with ICE to provide for the parole and deportation of criminal aliens. With this new collaboration, ICE will become engaged in the process prior to parole and provide the Rhode Island Parole Board with pertinent information on inmates before their parole eligibility date. This will speed-up deportation and get these inmates back to their respective countries in a more timely fashion. Additionally, this will be more cost effective. We will no longer bear the financial burden of providing housing or rehab treatment to these non-violent inmates.

The topic of illegal immigration stirs great emotion. I want to make one thing very clear: I support increasing the quotas to have more legal immigrants in the United States. I support granting more work permits to immigrants who are sponsored by employees. This is not about taking a hard line against immigrants. It's about making sure that those who come here can realize their goals of economic security and a better quality of life.

Illegal immigrants face many hardships. With no healthcare, no pension, and no social security they cannot fully participate in the American Dream. As long as the issue of illegal immigration remains unresolved on the national level, people will continue to suffer and our taxpayers will underwrite the costs. The federal government has failed to act, so we must take measures on the state level to bring some clarity and control to this complex issue.

We have, and always will, welcome legal immigrants to Rhode Island.

As you can also see, this is a bipartisan issue. I am, of course, working with the House minority members – Minority Leader Watson and Rep. Earhardt are here today – but this is an issue both parties are addressing. This year we have a significant number of bills which focus on illegal immigration. I support the concepts proposed in these bills. I know that Senator Cote and Representative Brien have put forth legislation which will require businesses to use the federal E-Verify program to ensure that new employees are authorized to work in the United States. And Representative Singleton has also submitted legislation which calls for greater collaboration between ICE and the Department of Corrections. These measures mirror what my Executive Order will accomplish. Additionally, Senator Breen and Representative Trillo have submitted a bill on my behalf which will deny workers' compensation to illegal immigrants and impose a penalty on those companies who knowingly employ unauthorized workers. Senator Maselli and Representative Palumbo have also offered legislation on these matters as have Senator Blais and Representative Carter.

I want to thank all of the members of the General Assembly who have submitted legislation which will address illegal immigration for their work on this issue and for joining me today.

We will always welcome legal immigrants to our state. But we have a responsibility to our citizens to uphold the laws of our nation.

####